

The Middle-Aged Woman in Fiction

By W. L. GEORGE.

IT has been remarked by critics, some kindly, some less well disposed, that the heroine of my new novel, "Her Unwelcome Husband," is a little unusual because she is a middle-aged woman. Indeed, as a rule, the heroine with whose miseries we are asked to sympathize, and whose triumphs we are expected to ache for, is either sweet seventeen or a lovely twenty-nine. The heroine of "Her Unwelcome Husband," Claire Caldecot, is thirty-eight; this is supposed not to be a romantic age, and I am asked how I can expect the public to be interested in such a character.

I would answer in the first place that there are in this world many women of thirty-eight, and that life does not end at thirty-eight. I see no reason why the heroine of a novel should not be forty-eight, or fifty-eight; I know of one novel where the heroine is a grandmother of sixty. The idea that people cease to be interesting at thirty-eight seems to me entirely false; in "Her Unwelcome Husband" I have tried to show that at thirty-eight one still may be the object of passion, and one may still live a colored life.

Of course this attitude is to a certain extent new. In the novel of fifty years ago it was not only unusual to find a heroine older than twenty-five, but it was even unusual to find a heroine married on the first page; she used to be married on the last page, and that was the novel. As regards age, our ancestors were very fierce; among my notes I find an extract from a novel, dated 1831, which says of one of the characters: "She was past the bloom of her first youth; she was twenty-two."

All that changed between the year 1830 and the year 1900. Certain novels, such as "The Woman Who Did," "The Heavenly Twins," the stories in the Yellow Book, set up the new theory that the really exciting things in a woman's life took place, not before her marriage, but after. Of course, people went a little too far; the pioneer novels, which threw aside the idea that the story of a wedding was not so interesting as the ending of a wedding, made out that the fate of women was to be married, miserable and misunderstood. Still they did show that marriage does not deprive a woman of attractions and of dreams; that it does not place her outside life upon a sort of shelf. The movement began with young wives; just before the war a number of novels concerned themselves with married women, aged twenty-five to thirty. Now we go further, and in "Her Unwelcome Husband" I show the tragedy of Claire Caldecot at thirty-eight, when her lover cares for her no more, with her husband, blackguard and blackmailer, coming to wreck anew a life he has wrecked once before, and when above all a man who has long loved her stoops to trickery . . . though she is thirty-eight. At thirty-eight Mrs. Caldecot can still command the love of men. I do not think this extraordinary.

Indeed, I suggest that it is natural and right to choose a heroine not too young as a subject for a romance. It is a mis-

take to think that a woman reaches her maximum attractiveness at twenty-five. Or even at thirty. She may do so, but if she does she is slightly forward in development. She may be exquisitely pretty, possess a loveliness which rends the hearts of men, but as a rule she has not touched maturity. She lacks what a woman between thirty and forty so often possesses, a sort of ripe fullness, a certain majesty. This may not last very long; it may be the prelude to old age, but it has the magnificence of summer, while earthly youth has rather the pale grades of spring. Also, love is not a question of beauty. Love is determined by the attraction, not only of the appearance, but of the mind, by intelligence, by wit, and above all, by the broad tenderness of an experienced heart. In that sense, where the elder woman sometimes fails in looks, she often triumphs in the realm of thought and feeling. She knows men better than her young rival, knows how they think, what attracts them, what soothes and encourages them when they are unhappy. . . . and she knows how to flatter them. While often the younger woman, being enthusiastic and greedy for life, thinks of taking more than of giving; being stronger she is often a

little hard to weakness; and the one she likes to flatter is very often herself.

Claire Caldecot, aged thirty-eight, is a fit heroine. I think that a woman such as herself, a woman of years, who has thought and felt, is infinitely more capable of true passion than the young girl who is still experimenting with life. I realize that Romeo and Juliet were very young, and indeed a great love may arise between a boy and a girl, but as a rule such a love does not develop. The true grand passions are the passions of women in the late thirties. One does not at once become capable of passion; there is such a thing as passionate education, an education which is given by life. To enjoy to the full, one must have enjoyed before; have learned to sacrifice; and above all, one must have learned that certain relationships between men and women are so valuable that fortune and life itself may well be thrown aside for the sake of such a bond. The older woman, a woman such as Claire Caldecot, can love more intensely because she has learnt to feel, and she can still love more intensely because she realizes that the years are short, that beauty is fleeting, that for the moment fate is kind in giving her a chance to love, that fate will not always be kind, and that here perhaps is her last chance.

Caveman Stuff

A Review by CLEMENT WOOD.

THE CAVEMAN WITHIN US. By William J. Fielding. E. P. Dutton & Co.

HAVE you a little Caveman in you? According to Mr. Fielding, we all have this shaggy haired, shaggy brained remnant rollicking around inside of us. This is the explanation of the frequent appearance of the Caveman in newspaper headlines to-day. To believe the captions, everybody's doing it in Caveman style—bankers, magazine publishers, Hollywood scraphs, law professors, Jersey rectors and wifely hammer throwing champions. There was the recent scarehead: "New Jersey Man Elopes Caveman Style with Widow in Ford." We had seen many Fords clearly dating back to the time when Methusalem was knee high to a dodo; this is the first evidence encountered that the Caveman too had his rattly flivver, his tintinnabulating tin lizard. Perhaps the Ford is merely an enlargement of the Cavebaby rattle.

Mr. Fielding has built up an interesting case for his theory that in each of us live two personalities—the modern and the primitive, the roughneck and the teahound and the Caveman and the flat dweller. He blames belief in witches upon the return of the Caveman that man's conduct so frequently exhibits. Riding the three legged horse of Freud, he discovers that dreams reveal the Caveman in all his riotous glory. Apparently he places among other diversions of the Caveman within us, wit and humor, exercise and adventure, absent mindedness, love, worry, fear, the

roots of all religion, the manifestations of radicalism and conservatism, mob spirit and Klaning, blue laws and censorship, many manifestations of genius in every field, and so on.

If this is the Caveman, Mr. Fielding, what does the Flat Dweller do? If this is the Roughneck, where does the Teahound come in?

It's deeper than that, Mr. Fielding. We've got a little Caveman in us, yes; but that isn't all, not by the lengthiest shot. Has anybody ever called you, Mr. Reader, "You poor fish?" We've got a Poor Fish in us too; we've got a bird—vulture or dove, or both; we've got a grizzly bear, a scimitar toothed tiger, a rumhound, a Peter Rabbit, a whale, a minnow, a crab, a spider, an ant, clear down to a one celled rural statesman—they are all inside of each of us. Go further yet, and you will find in each a chestnut tree, a cabbage, an orchid and a clump of nutgrass; deeper still, we have little drops of water, little grains of sand. . . . Inside each one of us we have a menagerie, an aquarium, a herbarium and a complete collection of minerals. If we could be properly subdivided we would each fill a museum of natural history.

It is important to meet Mr. Caveman and the rest of these, but it would have been helpful if Mr. Fielding had introduced us a little more fully to Mr. Culture in his various higher manifestations. There's Mr. Egyptian in us, Mr. Greek, Mr. Roman; there's Mr. Middle Ages, Mr. To-day and Mr. To-morrow. We need an elaboration of their conduct, their tendencies, their potentialities. Grant that a custard pie or a sledge hammer is not a sound intellectual argument; what is? Grant that the Klan method, the pogrom habit, the lynching trait is not progressive; what is? If we read through the extended and often irrelevant bibliography appended to each chapter, we might get the answer; but we would turn to scrappy stories and sneezy tales long before we half finished the young library Mr. Fielding magniloquently recommends. And when works of genius, like the products of Lester Ward, Freud and Jung, are placed side by side without discrimination with works by the late Andre Tridon, we feel that the author has not used his Mr. Culture as thoroughly as he has his Mr. Caveman, to whom the book is dedicated.

Hazlitt the Man

WRITING in 1836, six years after the death of Hazlitt, Bulwer Lytton said: "Posterity will do him justice. . . . A complete collection of his works is all the monument he demands." Yet it was not until 1906 that a complete, critical edition appeared (or, rather, a nearly complete edition), and it

is only now that we have anything approaching an adequate biography of him, although for nearly half a century he has been recognized as in many respects the most important literary critic of his half of the nineteenth century. Stevenson remarked forty years ago that "we are mighty fine fellows, but we cannot write like William Hazlitt." The major part of his work has become familiar enough, but surprisingly little has been known of the man behind it. Yet he is intrinsically one of the most humanly interesting of the many great men of his era; interesting, in part, because he is, or has been, an enigmatic figure personally. Even with an allowance for the love of billingsgate in the literary periodicals of the day it was hard to understand why *Blackwood's* should have called him "a small, fetid, bleary eyed pug" and an "acknowledged scamp of the lowest order . . . steeped in ignorance and malice." On the other side was Lamb's friendship and admiration for him.

Mr. Howe renders a fine service in this, the first fully competent attempt to portray Hazlitt the man. The picture that emerges is singularly vivid; it is produced with great skill, as Mr. Howe for the most part refrains from comment or analysis and lets the facts and records he produces speak for themselves. His work represents a colossal labor of research and of putting the mass of material together. He has woven it into a finely fluent narrative, though, as he says, he has merely added the necessary connective tissue to the letters, diaries and other testimony of Hazlitt's contemporaries. He has brought to light much new material, and is able to correct many current errors and to fill in certain gaps. But, most importantly of all, he has made of the whole an incontestably living portrait. With characteristic modesty he adds that "if on my groundwork a more attractive and lasting superstructure is one day erected I shall be the last to complain."

There will be, however, small need of any further strictly biographical work; one may confidently predict that Mr. Howe's study is definitive in that respect. But it does furnish a most attractive ground for further analytical, interpretative study, and one wishes that Mr. Howe had now and then let himself go a bit more freely in giving up his own opinion and inference, for when he does venture a comment it is always illuminating. Hazlitt's life calls peculiarly for the real psychoanalyst—but it would need a psychologist of the caliber of William James to handle it successfully. He was manifestly often the victim of his inhibitions and he was singularly unfortunate both in his first marriage and in a subsequent love affair that had a serio-comic ending, almost farcical, but wholly tragic to him. His second marriage, though it gave him several years of peace, also ended unhappily, and although he was able to say on his deathbed, "I have had a happy life," the pity of it is that it might so plainly have been a much happier one.

Space limits forbid any detailed examination of Mr. Howe's admirable work. It should be noted, however, that he clarifies most convincingly the quarrels between Hazlitt and Wordsworth and Coleridge—that "archangel, a little damaged," as Lamb put it. Mr. Howe is no hero worshiper, nor does he evade any difficulties, but he does show that in such a life as Hazlitt's it is peculiarly true that "to understand all is to forgive all." The volume is handsomely printed, with fine illustration, and is well indexed.

The publication of well chosen selections from the diaries and other "remains" of Crabb Robinson is an addition of importance to the literary data of the first third of the nineteenth century. Miss Morley announces that eventually she hopes to publish everything of value. This is but a foretaste. Robinson was indefatigable, and the mass of material is enormous. This volume is especially useful as the 1869 edition of the "Diary" and "Reminiscences" has long been out of print, and, moreover, is far from comprehensive. The selections given here deal chiefly with Blake and Coleridge, and with the famous quarrel between Coleridge and Wordsworth. Much of it is entirely new.

HENRY WALKER.

THE LIFE OF WILLIAM HAZLITT. By P. P. Howe. George H. Doran Company. BLAKE, COLERIDGE, WORDSWORTH, LAMB, & C.: SELECTIONS FROM THE REMAINS OF HENRY CRABB ROBINSON. Edited by Edith J. Morley. Longmans, Green & Co.

The Weigh of All Flesh

A Review by ROBERT H. DAVIS.

THE FUN OF BEING A FAT MAN. By William Johnston. Little, Brown & Co.

THE resignation with which Mr. William Johnston, in his volume entitled "The Fun of Being a Fat Man," accepts his more than twice-times-twelve-pound looks is truly commendable. Unwittingly the blithe William has given in this book a text for cheerfulness.

Right up in the front pages of Bill's book he blurts out:

I have reached that philosophic period in life when one looks back over the years to take stock of things; and, reckoning everything up, as I have been doing, I have decided that, fat as I am, fat as I always have been, fat as I am likely to be to the end of the chapter, I have had a lot of fun—I have been far happier than any of the thin men I know.

Here is a genuine and acceptable philosophy in any walk of life.

Throughout the book the author accepts everything without complaint. The

book is intended as a consolation creed for the large army of individuals whose clothes are made, not born.

His chapter on "How to Get Fat" is, as a defy, superior in every way to the Declaration of Independence. From the height of his protest he enunciates incontrovertibly the belief that a fat man's weight is strictly his own business. That alone justifies the progress in flesh. In defending this sovereign right Mr. Johnston strikes the melodious chord which reverberates through every paragraph.

One is convinced, upon reading the book, that a sudden change in the author's avoirdupois would bring about no appreciable change in his relation to things as they are.

I have no disposition to criticize Bill Johnston's majestic proportions, but I make bold to observe that, though Bill may be too fat, his book is too thin.

The illustrations by Herb Roth lend color to the conviction that Mr. Roth is taking on fat himself and likes it. The pictures are actually cracking with good humor.